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British army chief calls for creation of “citizen army” amid rising threat to the UK

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Gen. Sir Patrick Sanders, head of the British Army, has called for the creation of a "citizen army" in the United Kingdom that is prepared to engage in land-based warfare.

Expressing heightened concerns about the evolving threat from Russia, he underscored the limitations of relying solely on increased reserve forces and stressed the imperative for a broader strategy. While not advocating for conscription, Sanders emphasized the need to cultivate a mindset among the British public that would willingly embrace voluntary service in the event of war.

Sanders pointed to the steps taken by other European nations to ready their populations for a "war footing" and urged a similar shift in mindset within the United Kingdom. He made it clear that preparing the "pre-war generation" for the potentiality of war was a "whole-of-nation undertaking," emphasizing the gravity of the situation.

"We need an army designed to expand rapidly to enable the first echelon, resource the second echelon, and train and equip the citizen army that must follow," said Sanders. "Within the next three years, it must be credible to talk of a British Army of 120,000, folding in our [Army Reserve] and strategic reserve. But this is not enough."

"Our friends in Eastern and Northern Europe, who feel the proximity of the Russian threat more acutely, are already acting prudently, laying the foundations for national mobilization," he added.

Sanders' address also delved into the necessity of modernizing and equipping the U.K.'s armed forces to effectively meet the challenges of contemporary conflicts. He called for a strategic shift that would enable the British Army to rapidly expand, envisioning a force of 120,000 within the next three years, incorporating both regular and reserve components.

Highlighting examples from Sweden and Finland, where the proximity of the Russian threat looms large, Gen Sir Patrick emphasized the need for the UK to adopt a proactive approach to national defense.

Sanders' outspoken advocacy for a robust military capability echoes broader concerns about the adequacy of the U.K.'s defense preparedness. He has been a vocal critic of

reductions in troop numbers and military spending, advocating for a more substantial investment to address contemporary security challenges.

Britain considering changes to conscription rules

Despite the British *Ministry of Defense's* hesitancy, the prospect of active conscription is becoming all the more plausible in the U.K. in the event of World War III or another national security threat to the country.

Military authorities in Britain have expressed doubts about the adequacy of the current armed forces and reserves to safeguard the country, discussions have arisen regarding the country's rules regarding conscription.

Conscription was formally abolished in the U.K. in 1960. The Defense Ministry has stated that it was not calling for peacetime conscription, and Sanders himself has noted that his call for a citizen army does not entail conscription but merely underscores the importance of cultivating a sense of readiness and commitment among the public, aligning British armed forces policy with the changing dynamics of modern warfare.

However, discussions about possibly changing conscription rules have once again arisen as military recruitment numbers fall to their lowest levels in more than 300 years despite rising tensions in Ukraine, the Red Sea and Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, despite the Defense Ministry's hesitancy to admit publicly, the prospect of conscription in the U.K. is plausible if the country is directly threatened. Army bosses note that this would have to be done as the country – as Sanders pointed out – does not have a large enough active and reserve force to defend the country, especially from potential large assailant like Russia.

Wyn Rees, a geopolitics expert from the University of Nottingham, asserted that while World War III still isn't around, the world is currently navigating a period of great uncertainty.

As the geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, the need for a comprehensive and forward-looking national defense strategy becomes increasingly apparent, and Sanders' message resonates as more and more call for the U.K. to adapt and fortify itself against potential threats.

Watch Chair of the NATO Military Committee Adm. Robert Bauer discuss how civilians in Europe must prepare for war with Russia and its allies.

Sources:

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